

# Unethical Population Control Practices

**O**n the occasion of World Population Day last 11 July, the government of India was urged to put an immediate stop to aggressive population control policies and practices, the brunt of which is borne by women, often in total violation of ethical and medical guidelines.

Illegal trials and propagation of quinacrine pellets for the chemical sterilization of women are still current in India, despite the ban imposed on their importation, manufacture, distribution and sale. The ban was upheld by the Supreme Court on 16 March this year. This was revealed in an open letter to Dalit Ezhimalai, the Minister for Health and Family Welfare, by Saheli, a women's group working on issues related to women's health for the last 17 years.

But since the ban has not been applied with retrospect, the DCGI has claimed helplessness in taking punitive action. This, despite the fact that there is enough documentary evidence of the involvement of private practitioners, NGOs and even government hospital doctors in these malpractices, claimed Saheli. A booklet entitled *Quinacrine: a sordid story of chemical sterilisation of women* was released by the organization on Population Day last year.

Women subjected to illegal trials throughout the country continue to suffer the pain, menstrual abnormalities and complications caused by the procedure, and unwanted pregnancies due to its failure, without the follow-up that is expected of "clinical trials."

Saheli urged the Minister of Health to develop mechanisms to permit and monitor clinical trials, and to control the sale and use of hazardous drugs. "By farming out the health sector, the government has already shirked a large part of its responsibilities; it cannot abdicate them further," stated Saheli.

Source: Women's Feature Service, 15 July 1998

**Women in Action**, with ISSN 101-5048, promotes the empowerment of women through information sharing, communication and net-working. It is published by Isis International-Manila, an international non-government women's organisation, founded in 1974. Isis has sister offices in Santiago, Chile and Kampala, Uganda. Its network reaches over 50,000 individuals and organisations in 150 countries.

**Isis International-Manila** acknowledges the support and financial assistance of the following partner-donor organisations: Australian Agency for International Development (Australia), Australian People for Health, Education and Development Abroad, Inc. (Australia), Bilance (The Netherlands), Canadian International Development Agency (Canada), Christian Aid (UK), CIDA-ASEAN (Singapore), Commission on Interchurch Aid of the Netherlands Reformed Church, DIAKONIA Asia Regional office (Thailand), Evangelisches Missionwerk (Germany), Foundation for a Compassionate Society (USA), Global Fund for Women (USA), Global Ministries-The United Methodist Church (USA), Interchurch Organization for Development Cooperation (The Netherlands), the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation (USA), The Minister for Development Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs-Netherlands, National Centre for Cooperation in Development (Philippines), Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norway), Royal Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Denmark), Swedish Church (Sweden), Swedish International Development Authority (Sweden), United Nations Development Fund for Women (USA), Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (USA), World Association for Christian Communication (UK).

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